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NO GLASS HOUSE FOR CIA

CIA Director Stansfield Turner takes an appropriately intelligent approach to U.S. intelligence operations. If Congress doesn't like what the CIA is doing, Turner says, it should cut off funds or rewrite the agency's charter instead of demanding advance information on covert operations.

Testifying before the House Intelligence Committee, Turner pointed out that some CIA operations require the "utmost speed and secrecy" or an agent's life would be in danger. Wholesale congressional review before the fact, which some members of Congress want, would not be conducive to either speed or secrecy.

In the face of committee members' criticism of past CIA actions, such as the efforts to assassinate Cuban President Fidel Castro in the 1960s, Turner stood pat. He sensibly contended that Congress should not be able to halt such plans in advance because they fall under the executive branch's decision-making powers under the Constitution.

Also appearing before the committee was FBI Director William H. Webster. Webster argued that his agents should be able to use false information in counterintelligence operations against foreign spies. This tactic, he said, would be aimed only at foreign powers and not at American groups.

Both Turner and Webster testified about the proposed new charter for U.S. intelligence agencies.

The point that the two super sleuths make is that surveillance — whether it's at the domestic or foreign level — is not a game to be played under Marquis of Queensberry Rules. Fair play and spy work do not go hand in hand, not if the spying is to be carried out successfully. It is a deadly serious business that demands the utmost secrecy more often than not.

Turner urged the House panel to delete a provision requiring that Congress be notified of all spy activities before they are carried out. He logically noted that "every individual with access to prior notification

would have the power to veto the activity through a threat to disclose."

The CIA director argued convincingly that the requirements of congressional oversight would be fully met if the authorized committees learn of covert operations only after they are completed and if they receive "sufficient information to allow a judgment as to legality and propriety."

Turner also is opposed to a provision that would let Congress have "total accessibility" to CIA information, including agents' names. He is on solid ground. The folly of any such provision should be obvious. Why not simply demand that the CIA work in a glass house and be done with it?

Typical of those in Congress who hold views contrary to those of Turner is Rep. Les Aspin, a liberal Democrat from Wisconsin whose liberalism does not extend to the operations of the CIA. Aspin wants to tighten the congressional reins on U.S. intelligence agencies, claiming this would "prevent a return to the 'good old days' that proved to be an embarrassment to us as a nation..."

There are a great many Americans who yearn for the good old days — a time when the United States stood for something in the world — and who would welcome former national embarrassments as an alternative to the global ridicule the U.S. is subjected to today.

If Aspin's plan is followed it will only lead to a headache for Americans. No citizen of the U.S. wants to live in a police state of willful and arbitrary secrecy about foreign involvement. But every citizen concerned about the posture of America abroad, and the very real bearing this has on national well-being, should realize that effective and legitimate intelligence gathering is paramount to survival in an increasingly hostile world. The best defense is a strong offense. Spies — good ones, that is — are a necessary part of life. The new CIA charter should reflect this.